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## **Carson, Inhofe differ over solution to Tar Creek issue**

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**Photo by Gary Crow**

**U.S. Rep. Brad Carson (right) speaks with area resident Jack Sanders (left) about the problems at the Tar Creek Superfund site. Carson favors legislation to buy out residents of the site.**

Residents living in and around the Tar Creek Superfund site said Friday they would like a visit from Oklahoma's U.S. senators to discuss solutions to problems created in the abandoned mining district by mine waste.

"I want the politicians to come here and talk to us," said Scott Vanhooose, a Picher resident. "I have three children and they all have problems with their reading and comprehension. I need to hear an explanation why Sen. Inhofe will not support a buyout so I can move my children somewhere safe."

Vanhooose's comments came during an afternoon session of the fifth Annual Conference on Tar Creek at the Miami Civic Center. During the session, U.S. Rep. Brad Carson detailed a plan he is introducing in the U.S. House to provide \$50 million for a voluntary buyout program of Picher and Cardin residents.

An Inhofe aide criticized the plan Friday.

"We view the Brad Carson plan as an attempt to please everybody," said Jared Young, spokesman for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee chaired by U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, D-Okla. "We just don't see anything new there."

Young also said Carson, D-Claremore, does not have the technical expertise necessary to come up with a solution to the Tar Creek problems.

Brad Luna, a Carson spokesman, called on Inhofe to visit Tar Creek and the families affected by hazardous chemicals at the site.

"Senator Inhofe has been to Bosnia more times than he has been to Tar Creek," Luna said.

"In fact, he has never been to Tar Creek. You don't have to be an engineer. Just simply visit the site and

talk to the families in Picher and Cardin, and one would see that the only option is a buyout.”

According to Inhofe’s spokesman, the senator has visited Tar Creek several times.

“Others can play childish political games, but Sen. Inhofe is in the position to achieve a scientifically based and comprehensive approach to clean up Tar Creek,” Young said.

In a prepared statement, Carson challenged Inhofe “to be bound by the merits” of a much-anticipated report by the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

The report was due out almost a year ago but has never been made public. Carson said Friday he believes the report has not been released because it calls for a buyout of Picher and Cardin residents.

Carson pledged to follow the recommendations of the CEQ report and called on Inhofe to pledge his support for a buyout plan, if that is what the report recommends.

“I believe that a buyout is the critical step,” Carson said Friday before a gathering of about 150 people at the civic center. “I believe it’s time for an extraordinary solution.”

Carson plans to introduce “The Tar Creek Restoration Act” in the House this week. The proposal would cost up to \$50 million and offers voluntarily buyouts to landowners in the communities of Picher and Cardin.

Almost 1,800 people live in and around the two towns located at the center of the 40-square-mile Tar Creek site.

Federal and state authorities have spent close to \$100 million in the area, trying to clean up damage left over from 70 years of lead and zinc mining. The Tar Creek site was placed on the original Superfund priority list almost 25 years ago.

Carson’s plan calls for the purchase of about 800 homes and 50 businesses and the possible construction of a wetlands within the site.

Carson said Friday it will be impossible to pass the plan without the support of one of Oklahoma’s two senators.

“On an issue of narrow concern, and this is to the rest of the nation, you have to have an Oklahoma senator, and preferably both of them, to get this to pass,” he said. “I alone am probably not enough.”

Inhofe has expressed disdain for the wetlands plan suggested by former Gov. Frank Keating two years ago.

Thursday, as Carson’s plan began to emerge, Inhofe released a statement touting a memorandum of understanding among the EPA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior as a step toward a solution. In a prepared statement, Inhofe said “the MOU is an important document that will help expedite the cleanup process.”

The memorandum negotiated by representatives of the EPA, Department of the Interior and the Army Corps of Engineers states that the agencies will “develop a coordinated approach to address the numerous health, safety and environmental issues affecting the Tar Creek Superfund site.

The MOU outlines how each agency will appoint a representative at the agency headquarters that will serve as a point of contact to improve communications.

Agencies will also appoint representatives to a federal Tar Creek Steering Committee that will work with tribal, state and local governments to implement solutions for the area.

The MOU also outlines how the agencies will work together on such issues as plugging mine shafts, securing chat piles from unauthorized access, developing a hydro-geologic model, continuing yard remediation and moving forward with comprehensive cleanup.

“It’s a plan to have a plan,” said John Sparkman, chairman of the Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee and a vocal critic of the federal efforts. “I don’t see that it accomplishes very much.”